



COT/ BAOT Briefings

Returning to Practice

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Introduction

This briefing will provide information for you if you are looking at returning to practice after a period of absence, or if you did not enter practice for a significant period after obtaining an approved qualification. It will outline the requirements of the registration body, the Health Professions Council and will provide some practical advice and suggestions so that you feel confident about the steps you need to take.

The Health Professions Council's Requirements

The Health Professions Council (HPC) is the UK-wide statutory regulator for a number of professions (13 in 2007), set up following the Health Professions Order in 2001. It sets the standards of professional training, performance and conduct for the professions that it regulates, and maintains a register of health professionals that meet their requirements. It is a legal requirement for a practitioner to be registered with the HPC in order to practice using one of the registered professional titles (protected titles). This includes the title of 'occupational therapist'. Those on the register may have action taken against them if they fail to meet the required standards.

The HPC web site can be found at www.hpc-uk.org/

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

The HPC requires a period of updating knowledge and skills for those who wish to register in order to return to practice. The length of this period varies according to how long the applicant has been out of practice. The HPC publishes a leaflet entitled *Returning to Practice*, that can be downloaded from their website.

http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10001364returning_to_practice.pdf

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

The HPC return to practice requirements apply to anyone who has not practiced their profession for more than two years.

Length of time out of practice	Period of updating required
Two years or less	No requirements
Two to five years	30 days of updating
Five years or more	60 days of updating



If you have never registered with the HPC but have a professional qualification that was gained more than five years ago, the HPC can require you to update your knowledge and skills in the same way.

Period of updating

The period of updating can be made up of any combination of supervised practice, formal study or private study. The HPC's only requirement is that any private study makes up no more than 50% of the period of updating. The time can be managed to fit in with any other commitments. It does not have to be done full time or all at once. However, it must be done within the twelve months before you apply for registration.

'Supervised practice' is practice under the supervision of a registered practitioner who has been in practice for a minimum of three years and cannot be subject to any Fitness to Practice proceedings or orders. The practice concerned does not have to be clinical, but could be done in areas like teaching, management, or research.

'Formal study' is a time of structured study such as a relevant course programme, e-learning or a distance learning opportunity.

'Private study' is time that can be used to read, research web sites, journals etc. It can be no more than half the period of updating required.

Accessing formal return to practice schemes and funding support

England

Since 2004, responsibility for the provision and funding of return to practice programmes has been devolved to local Primary Care Trusts. However, the money stopped being ring-fenced at that stage. The policy supports NHS employers to offer a return to practice package that may include:

- free refresher training;
- a minimum of £1000 financial support whilst retraining;
- assistance with childcare support of up to £135 per week for one child and £200 for two or more children (Ref DH 2004) ; and
- assistance with travel and books. (Ref DH 2007 web site)

However, it is reported that, due to financial challenges, some PCTs have not been able to fund RTP schemes, even though there may be people willing to go on them. (Ref <http://www.nhsemployers.org/workforce/workforce-624.cfm>). You may need to approach a number of PCTs to see if there is any identified support available.

The College is not aware of any policy or formal arrangements for supporting return to practice in social care. Some local authorities may have their own arrangements, offering assistant posts whilst individuals arrange their own learning opportunities.

Scotland

There is a NHS Scotland guide called *Return to practice for allied health professions*. This provides all the information about re-registering and also useful resources and contact details. This is no longer available via NHS Scotland, but can be found on various web sites by searching for the exact title.



Information can be found on the Info Scotland web site

http://www.infoscotland.com/nhs/index.jsp?p_applic=CCC&p_service=Content.show&pContentID=56&

The Scottish Government (Executive) Health Department also has a web page dedicated to returning to practice for allied health professions. This gives more information on the financial assistance available.

http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/AHP/returners_guidance.htm

In Scotland the financial support is directed towards the NHS Boards who wish to support individuals returning to work. Funding applications can be submitted to the Scottish Executive Health Department by individual Heads of Service/Departmental Managers/AHP leads. Up to £1500 will be available to the host department for each returner, to cover training and development costs to the value of £1000, £500 towards expenses such as travel costs, books, child care and additional placement costs that will be paid through the employers' usual expenses claims system

The application for funding support has to be linked to an offer of employment within NHS Scotland. The funding is made available to the service supporting the returner, not to the individual. Funding is only available to organizations that have an existing vacancy that they are able to fill.

Wales

In 2003 the Welsh Assembly Government launched its return to practice scheme. Originally hosted by Health Professions Wales, this was absorbed into the National Leadership and Innovation Agency in Healthcare (NLIAH). An individual who wants to return to practice, or a department in which they are undergoing supervised practice, can apply to the NLIAH for funding. There is supposed to be £1000 per person towards the costs of courses or books etc. When the scheme was moved to the NLIAH insufficient funds were transferred across to meet demand. Negotiations are currently underway with the Welsh Assembly Government for further monies.

As in other countries HPC requirements apply and the returner will need to identify what learning needs they have, with help from their supervisor or the head of department.

For further information about return to practice in Wales, please contact Anne Duggan, Recruitment and Careers Officer, NLIAH

Tel: 01443 233472 Email: anne.duggan@nliah.wales.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland

In 2002 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety carried out a comprehensive review of the HPSS occupational therapy workforce. This reported the responses from questionnaires and interviews. Many respondents felt that there would be no demand for a return to practice course in Northern Ireland.' (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 2002, p 38)

However, the report recommendations stated that 'the Department should explore the potential for a return to practice initiative by assessing levels of interest through local advertisement.' (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 2002, p 53) This was done by placing large adverts in widely read newspapers, but with virtually no response. No further action has been taken.



What do you need to do?

- Consider the domain of practice you wish to return to and look at the guidance and policies that cover that domain of practice particular to your area of the UK. You will need to research and find the relevant policies and legislation that will impact on your chosen area of practice.

Start with Government web sites:

Department of Health

www.dh.gov.uk

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

The Scottish Government – Health and Community Care

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health>

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

Welsh Assembly Government – Health and social care

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/?lang=en>

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

Northern Ireland

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/>

(Accessed 18/09/2007)

The College also has specialist sections for most domains of practice. Each of these has a web site that can be accessed via the public side of the College web site. You can make contact with the specialist sections and ask for advice. The College web site can be found at: www.cot.org.uk (Accessed 18/09/2007)

Further information links are provided at the end of this briefing.

- If you are not yet a member of the British Association of Occupational Therapists (BAOT), consider membership of the professional organisation. Our publications, *Occupational Therapy News* and the *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, as well as our web site, provide current information and details of conferences and study days, which may be helpful to you. Membership also gives free access to briefings and guidance documents to support professional practice. You may wish to consider becoming a member of a relevant Specialist Section.
- Approach the Primary Care Trusts in your area to see if there are any funds or schemes available. If there are, they may have a formal programme for you to follow.
- If there are no formal schemes in your area, you will need to contact your local occupational therapy manager or service manager to see if you can organise your supervised practice in one or more of the local departments. You can also approach your local authority if you are interested in working in social care. Remember, this does not necessarily have to be clinically based, but could be in something like management, teaching or research. If you intend to work in the non-statutory sector, or in independent practice, you are advised to contact the Specialist Section - Occupational Therapists in Independent Practice. Their web site is at:
www.cot.org.uk/specialist/independent/intro/intro.php

(Accessed 18/09/2007)



If there is no financial support locally, any service that offers supervised practice is doing so over and above their requirements to provide a service. They will benefit by having the assistance of an experienced occupational therapist, especially if they can recruit you at the end of the updating period, but this depends on vacancies available.

Supervisory Period

Supervision and the role of the supervising occupational therapist

The HPC provide forms on which you record and inform them about your period of updating. The forms are available to download from the HPC web site. You may find it useful to read through these before you begin your updating, to see what is required. The supervising occupational therapist will need to be involved in completing these forms. The supervising occupational therapist must be registered with the HPC and have been in practice for at least the past 3 consecutive years. The supervisor will be required to be responsible for the supervision of the lapsed registrant's practice for the period of time specified.

The supervising occupational therapist will need to have a copy of the HPC standards, both the *Standards of Proficiency – Occupational Therapists* (2003) and the *Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics* (2003). These are available to download from the HPC website.

The COT *Professional standards for occupational therapy practice* (2007) may also help with this process, but they are not the standards against which a practitioner's competence will be judged for registration purposes.

The supervisor, with the returner, will need to identify which of these HPC standards apply to the area of practice to which they are returning and that will also enable them to do their job. Alongside this, a skills audit should also be undertaken in relation to the relevant domain of practice to identify gaps and skills required for this post. Some of the NHS organizations who provide return to practice programmes will have their own system for organizing the content of the supervisory period.

Once these have been identified, a package of learning will need to be developed with clear targets, evidence or outcomes to demonstrate that the required learning has been achieved.

This could be met in a variety of ways, and could include:

- shadowing an occupational therapist;
- practice based learning;
- written materials/piece of written work;
- attending courses;
- being observed in practice situations; and
- using materials from practice placements.

The supervisor can use and record this experience as continuing professional development.

Employment

A returner cannot legally be employed as an occupational therapist during their supervised period of updating as they are not yet registered. There may be local arrangements that the employing organisation's Human Resources/Personnel Department can advise on. The HPC suggests that a returner is employed as an assistant until they are fully registered.



Resources and further information:

Department of Health

Web site: www.dh.gov.uk

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

Health Professions Council,

Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BU

Web site: www.hpc-uk.org

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Website: www.nice.org.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

NHS Careers

Web site: www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

NHS Wales - Health of Wales Information Service

Web site: www.wales.nhs.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

Northern Ireland Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Web site: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

Scotland's Health on the Web

Web site: www.show.scot.nhs.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

This has a link to NHS Scotland Careers

Social Care institute for Excellence

Web site: www.scie.org.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

Social Care Online

Web site: www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/

(Accessed 25/09/2007)

Welsh Assembly Government

Web site: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/?lang=en>

(Accessed 25/09/2007)



References

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Department of Health (2004) *NHS childcare strategy/return to practice for nurses and allied health professionals*. London: DH.

Great Britain, Parliament (2002) *Health Professions Order 2001*. London: Stationery Office. (SI 2002 No 254)

Health Professions Council (2003) *Standards of proficiency – Occupational therapy* London: HPC.

Health Professions Council (2003) *Standards of conduct, performance and ethics*. London: HPC.

Health Professions Council (2006) *Returning to practice* London:HPC
http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10001364returning_to_practice.pdf